

# ***Planning Heritage & Design Partner***



***PHDP, LLC***

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September 9, 2023

Joe Heck  
St. Rita Parish  
CHIC Steering Committee Member  
Remodeling Work Group for St. Rita or Others Use  
4339 Douglas Avenue  
Racine, WI 53402

Re: Cascia Hall Site Visit, August 1, 2023.

Dear Joe:

It was very good meeting with you, Pastor Petersen, and Susane regarding the topic of the potential for repurposing the former Augustinian monastery and church. It's an impressive complex with a rich history thus the exercise of considering options for its repurpose is certainly warranted.

## **Building Assessment**

The key to repurposing is financial viability, and the first step to best inform this question is to have a complete building assessment prepared that provides a detailed status report of the building(s) and grounds. The assessment should provide initial analysis of the conditions of the following areas:

- Structural integrity of foundations, walls, ceilings, roofs and their compositions.
- Windows and doors.
- Exterior cladding and finished.
- Weather sealing systems such as caulking, weather stripping, paint.
- Interior and exterior electrical supply and dispersal systems.
- Electrical appliances such as outlets and lighting.
- Plumbing analysis including supply and waste systems, equipment, and hardware. Water and sanitary sewer lateral sizes, and capacities.
- Heating, cooling and ventilation supply and distribution systems and their energy sources.
- Interior finish (plaster, paint, woodwork, flooring, ceilings)
- Environmental issues such as lead based paint, asbestos, molds, radon, lead in plumbing.

- Site grading and drainage.
- Parking and drive surfaces.
- Landscaping concerns (unhealthy or unstable trees and shrubs).

### **Ownership Status/Options**

Once the building assessment report is available and reviewed by the necessary committees, ownership status should be considered. Several options present themselves in this regard. Below are just a few:

- Retain ownership and work to repurpose the building.
- Retain ownership but bring on a partner to manage the facility for leasing to events and tenants, and coordinate maintenance.
- Lease the Cascia building and grounds via a land lease to a leasee. Through the lease the leasee takes ownership of the building and any other improvements and pays to St. Rita Parish a monthly or yearly fee. All costs of maintenance, repair, improvements of existing facilities or new structures are the responsibility of the leasee for the term of the lease. A lease term of 25, 50, 75 or 99 years could be entered into.
- Sell the property containing Cascia but place deed restriction or restrictive covenants that ensure future uses compatible with the St. Rita Parish mission. Deed restrictions could include a right of first refusal should the property come up for sale in the future. Restrictions could also afford St. Rita parish the right to review all changes to operations, uses, building exteriors and grounds.
- Consult a professional real estate attorney or developer specializing in the repurposing of old structures. They will most certainly have additional options to present St. Rita Parish. Development firms that I am aware of that have undertaken similar projects in the Racine area are Gorman & Company <https://www.gormanusa.com/> and J. Jeffers & Co. <https://www.jjeffers.com/>.

### **National Register Inquiry**

Another task to consider completing in determining financial viability is to file a National Register Questionnaire with the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS). The questionnaire helps WHS determine if the facility would qualify as eligible for listing on the state and National Registers of Historic Places. If WHS determines that the facility is eligible, St. Rita Parish or some future owner or tenant entity could formally apply to WHS for such listing. Being listed can provide substantial tax credits to a future buyer and/or income producing property of a taxable entity for restoration and rehabilitation projects. These tax credits can help make a project more financially viable for a buyer or developer.

### **Redevelopment Examples**

My understanding is that St. Rita Parish has sent out requests for proposals (RFP) to a number of developers. This is another important step in the journey to determine the future of Cascia Hall. These developers will bring to bear their knowledge of market conditions and be able to help guide the Parish's course of action. And, as you are aware, the repurposing of similar facilities has been successfully undertaken by others resulting in event venues, retreat facilities, apartments, and transitional living communities. Some similar properties with repurposing outcomes are:

- Home Harbor, 1600 Ohio Street, Racine. Former nursing home remodeled into a transitional living facility/retirement community. <http://homeharborracine.com/>
- Lincoln Apartments, 1800 Northwestern Avenue, Racine, WI. Former school converted into a senior living facility.

- The Covenant at Murray Mansion, 2219 Washington Avenue, Racine, WI. Former church and parsonage converted into an event venue. [Covenant@Culinary-Infusion.com](mailto:Covenant@Culinary-Infusion.com)
- The DeKoven Center, 600 Caron Butler Drive, Racine, WI. Former Racine College transitioned into retreat center, event facility, rental housing and AirBNB. <https://www.dekovencenter.org/grounds>
- Sisters of St. Joseph, 1300 Maria Drive, Stevens Point, WI. Former convent being redeveloped into apartments for senior and family housing. <https://stevenspoint.news/2021/04/04/a-new-era-the-grove/>  
<https://www.wsaw.com/2022/04/27/new-convent-apartment-project-breaks-ground-stevens-point/>
- Kemper Center, 6501 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Kenosha, WI. Former girls boarding school transitioned into a conference center, performance space, exhibition facility, event space, studios space. <https://kempercenter.com/>
- St. James 1868, 833 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee. Former St. James Episcopal Church turned into a wedding event space. <https://stjames1868.com/>

Many more similar adaptive reuse facilities can be found throughout southeastern Wisconsin, the state and the region. Developers responsive to the Parish's RFP should be able to identify these for St. Rita Parish.

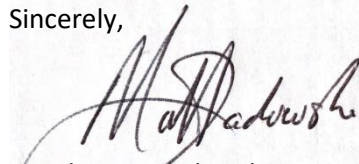
#### **Tour Impressions**

First impressions of the facility that I and my colleague, Earl VanderWielen, had were that the facility is well-constructed. However, there is much to be done to, at minimum, bring the building up to current codes: electrical, plumbing, accessibility, HVAC and meet current expectations for bathroom and kitchen facilities. Damage from rainwater and ice melt infiltration, while not alarming and excessively damaging to this point, none-the-less, needs to be addressed to stabilize the building(s) and arrest any damage already sustained. The exterior is in need of tuck pointing and/or repointing in places which could address rain and ice melt infiltration. Finally, the full extent of needed environmental remediation for lead and asbestos (and others) is unquantified at this time.

The speculated costs involved with addressing just the items listed above points to the outcome of selling the building(s) and some attendant property to a developer or development entity as the most appropriate route for St. Rita Parish to pursue. However, a complete building assessment should better inform potential costs and any ownership status decisions.

I wish you and the St. Rita Parish success in your journey to chart the future of Cascia Hall, and the Parish. If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Matthew G. Sadowski

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